

We claim:

1. A system for conducting a transaction via an electronic mail message, the system comprising:
  - a first server component for sending an electronic mail message to a recipient;
  - a second server component for receiving data;
  - a third server component for effecting a transaction in response to data received by the second server component;
  - a client mail application for receiving the electronic mail message from the first server component, displaying the message to the recipient and enabling a recipient to interact with the message;
  - the electronic mail message comprising content that includes means for enabling communication with the second server component whilst the message is displayed to the recipient for sending data to the second server component in response to the recipient's interaction with the message.
2. A system according to claim 1, comprising one or more server components for sending data to the mail message to enable two-way communication between an electronic mail message displayed to the recipient and one or more server components.
3. A system according to claim 1 wherein the content of the electronic mail message for enabling communication with the second server component comprises an object or component embedded in the message.

4. A system according to any one of claims 1, wherein the content of the electronic mail message for enabling communication with the second server component comprises means for loading on or after  
5 opening of the message an object or component to be displayed within the mail message to the recipient.
5. A system according to claim 4 wherein the object or component comprises a mail reader application component or enhancement that provides a dynamic  
10 environment with which a recipient of the message can interact.
6. A system according to claim 5 wherein the object or component comprises a plug-in component or virtual machine.
- 15 7. A system according to claim 6 wherein the object or component comprises a flash movie.
8. A system according to claim 6 wherein the object or component comprises a Java applet.
9. A system according to claim 4 wherein the object or  
20 component comprises means to validate data entered by a recipient of the message.
10. A system according to claim 9 wherein the means to validate data operates to validate the data with reference to rules or data held locally by the object  
25 or component.
11. A system according to claim 9 wherein the means to validate data comprises means for communicating with

a server component to validate data with reference to external rules or data sources.

12. A system according to claim 4 wherein the object or component is sand-boxed.
- 5 13. A system according to claim 1 wherein the electronic mail message includes alternative content that is visible to the recipient in the event that the means for communicating with the second server component is inoperable.
- 10 14. A system according to claim 1 comprising a server component for generating the electronic mail message to be sent.
- 15 15. A system according to claim 14, comprising a store of one or more mail message templates accessible by the server component for generating the electronic mail message.
16. A system according to claim 1 wherein the electronic mail message is personalised for a particular recipient or group of recipients.
- 20 17. A system according to claim 1, wherein the third server component comprises means for storing the received data in a data store.
18. A system according to claim 1, wherein the third server component comprises means for forwarding the data to another address, application, service or system.
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19. A system according to claim 1, wherein the third  
server component comprises means for interacting with  
one or more payment gateways and/or other  
applications, services or systems responsible for  
5 fulfilment of an order.

20. A server system for conducting a transaction via an  
electronic mail message, the server system  
comprising: ✓

10 a first server component for sending an electronic  
mail message to a recipient;

a second server component for receiving data; and

a third server component for effecting a transaction  
in response to data received by the second server  
component;

15 the electronic mail message comprising content that  
includes means for enabling communication with the  
second server component whilst the message is  
displayed to the recipient for sending data to the  
second server component in response to a recipient's  
20 interaction with the message.

21. An electronic mail message comprising content that  
includes means for enabling communication with a  
server component whilst the message is displayed to a  
recipient for sending data to the server component in  
25 response to interaction of the recipient with the  
displayed message.

22. An electronic mail message according to claim 21,  
comprising means for receiving data from one or more  
server components to enable two-way communication

between the electronic mail message when displayed to a recipient and the one or more server components.

23. An electronic mail message according to claim 21 wherein the content of the electronic mail message for enabling communication with the server component comprises an object or component embedded in the message.


24. An electronic mail message according to claim 21 wherein the content of the electronic mail message for enabling communication with the server component comprises means for loading on or after opening of the message an object or component to be displayed within the mail message to the recipient.

25. An electronic mail message according to claim 24 wherein the object or component comprises a mail reader application component or enhancement that provides a dynamic environment with which a recipient of the message can interact.

26. An electronic mail message according to claim 25 wherein the object or component comprises a plug-in component or virtual machine.

27. An electronic mail message according to claim 26 wherein the object or component comprises a flash movie.

28. An electronic mail message according to claim 26 wherein the object or component comprises a Java applet.

29. An electronic mail message according to claim 24 wherein the object or component comprises means to validate data entered by a recipient of the message.
- 5 30. An electronic mail message according to claim 29 wherein the means to validate data operates to validate the data with reference to rules or data held locally by the object or component.
- 10 31. An electronic mail message according to claim 29 wherein the means to validate data comprises means for communicating with a server component to validate data with reference to external rules or data sources.
32. An electronic mail message according to claim 24 wherein the object or component is sand-boxed.
- 15 33. An electronic mail message according to claim 21 comprising alternative content that is visible to the recipient in the event that communication with the a server component is inoperable.
- 20 34. An electronic mail message according to claim 21 wherein the message is personalised for a particular recipient or group of recipients.
- 25 35. A method for conducting a transaction via an electronic mail message, the method comprising:   
sending an electronic mail message from a first server component to a recipient;  
receiving the electronic mail message at a client mail application, the mail application displaying the message to the recipient and enabling the recipient to interact with the message;

in response to interaction of the recipient with the electronic mail message, the message content operating to communicate with a second server component whilst the message is displayed to the recipient to send data to the second server component;

the second server component receiving the sent data; and

effecting a transaction in response to the data received by the second server component.

36. A method according to claim 35, comprising sending data from one or more server components to the mail message to enable two-way communication between an electronic mail message displayed to a recipient and one or more server components.

37. A method according to claim 35 comprising validating data entered by a recipient of the message.

38. A method according to claim 37 wherein the data is validated with reference to rules or data held locally at the client mail application.

39. A method according to claim 37 wherein the data comprises is validated with reference to external rules or data sources.

40. A method according to claim 35 where in the event that the means for communicating with the second server component is inoperable alternative content is displayed to the recipient within the electronic mail message.

41. A method according to claim 35 comprising generating the electronic mail message to be sent.
42. A method according to claim 41, wherein a mail message template is used for generating the electronic mail message.
43. A method according to claim 35 comprising personalising the electronic mail message for a particular recipient or group of recipients.
44. A method according to claim 35 comprising storing the received data in a data store.
45. A method according to claim 35 comprising forwarding the received data to another address, application, service or system.
46. A method according to claim 35 comprising interacting with one or more payment gateways and/or other applications, services or systems responsible for fulfilment of an order.
47. A method for conducting a transaction via an electronic mail message, the method comprising:  
sending an electronic mail message from a first server component to a recipient, the electronic mail message comprising content that includes means for enabling communication with a second server component whilst the message is displayed to the recipient for sending data to the second server component in response to the recipient's interaction with the message;  
receiving at the second server component data sent in response to interaction of the recipient with the



electronic mail message; and

effecting a transaction in response to the data received by the second server component.

48. A method for conducting a transaction via an electronic mail message, the method comprising:

receiving an electronic mail message at a client mail application, the mail application displaying the message to a recipient and enabling the recipient to interact with the message;

in response to interaction of the recipient with the electronic mail message, the message content operating to communicate with a second server component whilst the message is displayed to the recipient to send data to the second server component in order to effect the transaction.

49. A system according to claim 48 comprising the electronic mail message receiving data from a server component whilst it is displayed to the recipient to enable two-way communication between the electronic mail message displayed to the recipient and one or more server components.

50. A method according to claim 48 comprising on or after opening of the message communicating with a server component and loading an object or component to be displayed within the mail message to the recipient.

51. A method according to claim 48 comprising validating data entered by a recipient of the message.

52. A method according to claim 51 wherein the data is validated with reference to rules or data held locally at the client mail application.

53. A method according to claim 51 wherein the data  
5 comprises is validated with reference to external rules or data sources.

54. A method according to claim 48 where in the event that the means for communicating with the second server component is inoperable alternative content is  
10 displayed to the recipient within the electronic mail message.